

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Major General Kevin Bergner, Spokesman and Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Effects,  
Multi-National Force – Iraq**

**Major General Mark Hertling, Commander of General Multi-National Division –  
North and First Armored Division**

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**REPORTERS:**

**Steven Farrell from The New York Times  
Larry Kaplow from Newsweek  
Stephanie Gosk from NBC  
Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio  
Patrick Quinn from The Associated Press  
Meryl Calvin from The Sunday Times**

**REPORTERS 1-8**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm pleased to be joined today by Major General Mark Hertling, the Commander of Multi-National Division–North. General Hertling assumed responsibility for the northern Multi-National Division in October of this year. I'll give you a quick update and then we'll turn to him for an update on operations in the north; in particular, Operation Iron Reaper. Let me begin by mentioning another honor that has been achieved by the Iraqi National Soccer Team. They were named the number one soccer team in the world by "World Soccer Magazine", adding to what has already been a very successful year by the national team. And so we want to extend to them our congratulations and to the people of Iraq that they proudly represent. While al-Qaeda in Iraq continues to be the principal threat to security and stability in Iraq, the Iraqi people are taking a stand against them at the local level, in tribal commitments, and at the national level. Al-Qaeda in Iraq's foreign leadership and their corrupt ideology are also being rejected by the Iraqi people. And what we've seen...and we have seen that reflected in the public reaction to the most recent video by Zawahiri. In fact, we have indications that some al-Qaeda fighters are dissatisfied with Abu Ayyub al-Masri's leadership. And we have also seen the effects of consistent pressure on the network in capturing and killing those

who are running it. In that regard, there have been several recent actions that I would like to note. Last Wednesday, near Karma, Iraqi forces, in tandem with U.S. Special Forces, detained an al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorist cell leader who controls more than 300 terrorists. This terrorist is reported to be responsible for IED and mortar attacks that have killed and wounded Iraqi and coalition forces. And on Friday, in the Baghdad neighborhood of east Rashid, coalition forces arrested two al-Qaeda in Iraq financiers; known al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorists were being paid by these men for conducting terrorist activities in the area. On Saturday, near Iskandariyah, Iraqi Army and coalition forces launched Operation Marne Roundup, an operation focused on al-Qaeda extremists and weapons smugglers. Coalition forces destroyed two buildings used by insurgents who were storing materials for improvised-explosive devices. And we are already seeing concerned local citizens in the area beginning to work with the Iraqi police to improve security of major roads leading to and from Iskandariyah. On Monday, north of Baghdad, coalition forces captured al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader for their network north of Baghdad which includes the area of Tarmiyah. This terrorist had been the replacement for Thai'ir Malik, who was killed on November 5<sup>th</sup>. Sustained efforts against al-Qaeda continue to disrupt their organization even as they attempt to regenerate leadership. In many cases, these operations were made

possible by local intelligence provided by concerned local citizens. Working in tandem with security forces, concerned local citizens are playing a key role in decreasing...in the decreasing trends of violence and improving stability across Iraq. There are some 300 concerned local citizen groups with nearly 71,000 Iraqis who have stepped forward to help protect their communities. Of these 71,000, roughly 21,000 are already interested in serving in the Iraqi security forces. The Government of Iraq's commitment to assume both fiscal and overall responsibility for this effort is now moving forward as they also begin structuring the vocational training programs for concerned local citizens who eventually will want to rejoin and take a civilian...a place in the civilian workforce. Even as Iraqi security forces and civilian volunteers expand and improve security, representatives from ministries within the Government of Iraq held the first meeting of the Joint Rural Planning Committee in Baghdad on Sunday with the Baghdad provincial governor's office and the Taji qada. The directors-general of the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the Ministry of Agriculture attended the meeting along with various representatives from Taji. The purpose of these joint rural planning committees is to better coordinate and de-conflict the projects between Government of Iraq ministries, local governments, coalition forces, and other agencies. Some of the topics for this first

meeting included road projects, agriculture, essential services such as water and sewer projects, education, and the construction of schools along with the budgets that make these projects possible. This meeting marked the first time...the first one of what will become a recurring program where representatives from the outlying neighborhoods around Baghdad will present information in a shared environment and better coordinate their actions. Also on Monday, in the Rashid District of Baghdad, a medical summit was held to discuss Iraq's medical capabilities and the plans for future requirements. New X-ray equipment was presented to the Furat General Hospital and a follow-up summit was also planned. Programs such as the Joint Rural Planning Committees and the Rashid Medical Summit would be difficult to carry out were it not for the improving security situation we're seeing throughout Iraq. Nevertheless, we will continue to face a tough fight. As we tenaciously pursue al-Qaeda, we will face upturns in violence as a result of al-Qaeda fighting back. But we will continue to keep pressure on the terrorist networks and reduce the prospects of their being able to re-establish bases or safe havens. And with that, I'd like to turn to General Hertling for some brief remarks and then we'll both be glad to take your questions.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Thanks, Kevin. My good friend, Kevin, asked me to come down

today because there's been a lot of discussion about what's going on in the northern area of Iraq which falls under our purview. I have the great honor of commanding Task Force Iron, Multi-National Division–North as well as working with the four Iraqi Army divisions that are in the northern regions, the four provinces, which make up our area of operation. I don't have a formal statement because I would like to take questions given that our province is so diverse...or our area of operation is so diverse with the four different provinces and the type of concerns that we have. And the amount of activity that's going on in those four different provinces has generated a lot of information. And I've seen a lot of reports from the media concerning what is going on up there. We have various operations. We just finished, as Kevin mentioned, Operation Iron Reaper. We're in the very final stages of that. It's an operation that started on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, aimed at an area in the vicinity of the Golden Triangle in the Diyala Province. But there's also been some of our operations ongoing in Mosul and in some areas of Salah ad Din. That followed up an operation we conducted in early November called Operation Iron Harvest which I've also already reported to the press. What we've seen as we've gone through these operations, is a continuing desire by the people within the cities and the provinces we operate in with the Iraqi Army—and we're doing all of our operations jointly with the Iraqi

security forces—that they have been given an increasing sense of security in those provinces. It's not perfect yet. We are still continuing to strive to rid extremists from our various areas of operations. And I think what happens after we conduct operations there, there's more of an opportunity, in some cases, for the locals to get back to normalcy; to form, in some cases, the concerned local citizens group. After we conducted several operations the governors of three different provinces, of Salah ad Din, Ninawa, and Kirkuk, all came together and decided that they would act in a key area where the confluence of those three provinces came together to start up their own local citizens group. And we've seen a decrease in activity in that specific area as well. What I'd like to point out though is we still have a hard fight. Many of you have reported that as the rest of the country has seen increasing stability—and I think General Petraeus reported there's been somewhere between a 60 and 70 percent decrease in violence, things like IED attacks against ISF and coalition forces—we have not seen the same level of decrease. We have seen a decrease. In most areas that we measure the attacks against both coalition forces and Iraqi security forces, the number of IEDs, it varies between 40 and 50 percent decrease from the levels that we had in June. It is not as good as the rest of Iraq. We are slower in coming around and I think, primarily, because, it's been reported in the past, some of the extremists have

been pushed east from Anbar Province as they've seen the awakening movement there and north from Baghdad as the surge operations took place there. And many of them have transited to our province between the southern part of Diyala all the way up to Mosul and out into the Syrian countryside. I know that there's many questions about some of the things that are going on in each specific area of our area of operations so I'll leave that as my opening statement and then I think both of us will take questions.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

And with that, we will take your questions. Yes, sir.

**REP1:**

Steven Farrell of The New York Times. Are you going to have to go back into Diyala in a big way in a long-term, large-scale operation to sort out the situation there? Because there seems to be a high level of underlying activity and al-Qaeda and insurgent trouble going on in that [unintelligible].

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

There is a level of activity by al-Qaeda in those areas, in some of the areas where the security forces are continuing to grow. But interestingly enough—because I've read the reports of a rabid province and some of the unbelievable violence there which, quite frankly, is taking place in some of the cities of Diyala—but, in fact, the attacks in Diyala Province are also down. In fact, it's one of our



better provinces because of the influence of the Iraqi security forces. Having said that, I will tell you that we are continuing operations in Diyala Province. The operation that's ongoing there, part of Operation Iron Reaper, is in the Golden Triangle which is the western portion of Diyala. And we have found quite a bit of al-Qaeda activity as evidenced by some of the caches that we've found, some of the trauma that they have inflicted on the citizens, some of the brutality that they have inflicted throughout the countryside. And I can cite a few examples of that. One of which occurred last Monday when we discovered several caches, a torture facility that had chains, a bed—an iron bed that was still connected to a battery—knives and swords that were still covered in blood as we went in to go after the terrorists in that area. And, in fact, we captured and killed numerous al-Qaeda members in that particular find. So, yes, there are still some very bad things going on in that province. We're continuing to pursue and that's how I would classify our operations in Diyala and all the rest of the provinces. We are continuing to pursue al-Qaeda so that they don't find a safe haven anywhere within our area of operations.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP2:**

Thank you. Larry Kaplow with Newsweek. Can you tell us who

the...in like Mosul and Salah ad Din, what kind of attacks you're seeing in terms of who the targets are? Are they coalition forces or are they Iraqi security forces? Is it like Kurdish versus Arab stuff in Mosul?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

That's a great question. And, in fact, as I've told you, our provinces are very diverse in types of attacks. Specific...I can address specifically Mosul, but what we're seeing throughout the MND-North area is...it depends. It depends on what part of MND-North you're in if it's an attack against coalition forces, Iraqi Army, Iraqi police, concerned local citizens. Each one of our areas has a different metric of measuring attacks. What we're seeing in Mosul, quite frankly, is a difference between the east side and the west side. On the western side of the city, they are continuing to attack Iraqi police and Iraqi Army. On the eastern side of the city, they are attacking citizens. As you go outside of the City of Mosul, they're continuing to attack coalition forces. Even though, police, Army, and coalition forces are in each one of those areas. And it seems to us that as we're evaluating Mosul, that it's an attempt to prevent Iraqi security forces, specifically the police, from building. There is more Iraqi Army forces on the eastern side than there are on the western side. So we're helping that a little bit with increased coalition force presence on the western side. And that's, in part,

going to change because of several of the battalions of General Mutha's[ph] 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division is going to return to Mosul here shortly after they've completed the support of the surge here in Baghdad. I hope that answers your question.

**REP2:**

How about Salah ad Din?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Salah ad Din is a little bit different. It was...and take as an example Samarra. A few weeks ago, it was the Iraqi police inside the city. Since there's been an increase in the national police that has come back to help coalition forces and as coalition forces have built up security in the city by berming the entire city and by increasing the amount of checkpoints, what we've seen is a very steep decrease in the number of total attacks inside the city. But what we're seeing in the surrounding areas is an increased attack against civilians and an increase in IEDs on the outside of the city. What we're seeing, if I could continue on Samarra for just a minute, is we've increased both coalition force presence in the city and they've been joined by the national police and the local police. What we've seen—Samarra was a dead city two months ago. What we've seen in the last several weeks is it's increasing in shops being opened—not so much around the Golden Dome yet or the Golden Mosque yet—but in the outer areas. And as security increases throughout the city

we're seeing a lot of shops being open and more activity on the streets.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

I guess the one point I'd add on to General Hertling's comments on a national level across Iraq, is we are also seeing the Iraqi security forces in general, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police, increasingly the first line of defense. They are suffering casualties, suffering losses—frequently at two to three times that of the coalition. And you're seeing those courageous Iraqis who are stepping forward to take a stand in their local communities also being targeted; which is, perhaps, one of the clearest signals of the effect they're achieving in thwarting the freedom of the new...for freedom of action by al-Qaeda.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

If I can add to that again, I'm sorry for continuing to add to this. But the Iraqi security forces, especially the Iraqi Army, has been substantially improved since the last time I was here a few years ago. And what I see in our four divisions that we work with continually, not only a capability to work in joint operations but a desire to work in joint operations; to ask us for assistance on things like intelligence, aviation support, artillery support. And we are continuing that teaming by, in fact, including them in some of our training events and sharing with them increasing amounts of

intelligence. We just had yesterday, as an example, our aviation brigade go to one of the divisions to conduct a training operation on air assault operations. Our four division commanders in our area, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, each one of them—I tell you, I would go to war with any one of them on any given day.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP3:**

Ma'am.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

I'm sorry.

**REP3:**

That's okay.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Go ahead.

**REP3:**

Stephanie Gosk with NBC. There are some reports that in Baqubah some of the concerned local citizens were having problems with the Iraqi police. Is that a pervasive problem?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

It's not pervasive, Stephanie. What I'll tell you, it's a continuing desire—and I'll go back to what I just said about specifically the division commander in that area, Major General Salam[ph] who commands the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division. It's a continuing desire to

contribute but not knowing how. And I think in that...in Baqubah specifically, they don't know how to act with the Iraqi Army. General Salam[ph] had just issued a decree, he pulled all the concerned local citizens together, validated our desires to have every single CLC work with an element of the Iraqi security force so that they are under the supervision of the ISF in one way or another. It's interesting you ask that because in Baqubah last Tuesday, I was on a patrol with Lieutenant Colonel Fadal[ph] who commands one of the battalions in the 5<sup>th</sup> IA, and he was explaining to me how he was using the CLC as part of his force to go further out than what he had been able to do previously with his Army forces. And it was interesting to me because this guy—by the way, he happens to be one of the best battalion commanders I've seen—literally had the CLCs, who many of which were ex-soldiers, working side-by-side with their soldiers and they were desiring to become a part of the Iraqi Army. I hope that helps.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP4:**

Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio. Two questions. I guess this first one will be for General Bergner but if it's easier you can answer it. Just if you can talk overall about the status of integrating the CLC members into the Iraqi police force. I assume,

you know, it depends on where you are, how good it's going. But can you just overall talk about it. And, also, for General Hertling, a recent attack on a bridge in Mosul a couple of days ago. Can you talk about the status of that bridge?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

I can.

**REP4:**

And its significance. And our staff was telling us if you cut off the roads that go west of that bridge, you may have a nice safe haven for insurgents over there. Can you just talk about that bridge and...

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Sure can.

**REP4:**

...and what its status is right now, too.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Sure I can.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, let me start. First of all, the Government of Iraq, as you know, has formally committed to accept the responsibility for and coordinate the integration of these concerned local citizens into either the legitimate security forces of Iraq and/or to help coordinate the vocational and technical transition that would be appropriate for them to find jobs in the civilian workforce again. As part of this ongoing effort, you'll remember that a key part of this has always

been a screening and a vetting at the local level by the tactical units that these individuals interact with. So there's already a good basis of biometric data, iris scans, ten-point fingerprints correlated with the serial number of their weapon if they...all of those kinds of things. That is what the Government of Iraq will begin assuming accountability for and oversight of. Even as they arrange the necessary funding to pick up responsibility for the contracts that some of these individuals are being paid under. And they are also working the screening and vetting that's appropriate for them to be considered as qualified candidates to join either the Iraqi police or the Iraqi Army forces. So far in western Baghdad, in the Abu Ghraib area, there has already been a large matriculation of two different police classes. I think one around 700 and the other around 800; over 1,500 individuals there who have actually gone through that whole process and been matriculated as members of the Iraqi police. There are other lists now that are currently being screened in different areas of Baghdad, different districts where these concerned local citizens have organized. And they are now being vetted with the Ministry of Interior for acceptance into the Iraqi police. And there are others throughout MND-Center, MND-North, and MND-Baghdad that are organizing their lists for formal consideration by the Government of Iraq. So that's a process that's in train, it's underway. And it's one that, if you can...I think what we would ask



is that you'd have a sense that we would not overstate the expectation here; have a sense of the difficulty that's involved. Because these are decentralized groups of individuals that have to be organized and data collected from in such a way that a centralized process within the Iraqi security ministries can get them into their systems and processes. And so we're helping at the local level working with provincial police chiefs and we're helping at the national level working with the ministries themselves to provide the necessary oversight and transparency where each of these groups is so that they can make that process take place.

**REP4:**

Would you characterize it as slow or fast?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Actually, I think I would characterize it as saying...I would say it's encouraging and it's underway. And, you know, the actual tempo and pace that it proceeds at is not...is a function of a lot of things. Not the least of which is capacity. And the fact that this is coming from a different direction than some of their processes had otherwise been set up to deal with.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

If I could add to that, too, because it's very interesting in our area. Over about the last several months, we've had a little over 15,000 individuals who want to become members of the concerned local

citizens. We've set some very specific rules. They only have their own weapons and it's a rifle or below; rifle or pistol—no heavy weapons as you know. They have to wear some type of uniform and that uniform varies. They're under the control of the Iraqi security forces. There's no offensive operation. It's always in a specific area. And we ask them, as Kevin said, the BATS-Hide systems, the biometric data that's collected is critically important. What we're seeing of that 15,000 plus though, is only about 20 percent of them actually want to become either police or Army; mostly police because they don't want to leave their local areas. They don't want to be subject to the movement around that an Army unit would. Obviously, all of them are joining the concerned local citizens for the pay. They...not all of them for the pay. But, I mean, they're doing that to get a job primarily but, secondarily, some of them want to become security forces. So, what we really want to do is make sure the process continues where the economy continues to build and we can get the ones who don't want to become Iraqi policemen into other kind of lines of work. But it's been kind of fascinating going back to what Stephanie said. In some areas, it's working very well. In some areas, there's still a little bit of confusion that sheikhs or tribal leaders think that they control the CLCs; they do not. In some areas, there may be contention between the police or the CLCs and even, in some cases, police, CLC, and

Army. But we're working through that with the various ministries.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Before you answer Mosul Dam, too, I would just go back to one other point. And, you know, this really started in Anbar Province and it was a result of tribal sheikhs and the decisions that were made there that they were going to reject al-Qaeda and they were going to encourage the sons of Anbar to join the legitimate security forces of Iraq. So I don't think they were called concerned local citizens back then. But this process of where we are now actually comes forward from that experience. And as you know, there are thousands of sons of Anbar who are now part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division or the 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Division. And thousands that have now joined their police force or are continuing to join, going through the academy that has now been created out there specifically to help the province have the necessary capacity to matriculate citizens into their police force. So that has taken some time. And these other efforts will follow in a similar kind of pattern. I guess I would close the discussion, though, by saying this isn't one where the metric of progress or the way ahead is really a function of how long it takes. It's really important to note the commitments that have been made. And the fact that these individuals at the local level are now being recognized by their national government and being afforded the opportunity to serve as

a part of the legitimate security forces. That's what's critical here. And so as we move forward it's sustaining that commitment and helping it be fulfilled. And that's not so much a function of time.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

One of the things I'll add, one more thing, is of the 80 cache sites that we found during Operation Iron Reaper, 39 of them came about because of tips from concerned local citizens to either the police or the Iraqi Army. That's significant in and of itself. That means that less people are dying in the road, less Iraqis are dying on the road, and I think that's pretty significant. Finally, to the Mosul Dam. We're not quite sure what that was. There are several indicators that it could have been—and we're pulling some strings on intelligence—we have some intelligence that said it was part of a bigger plot. There is some intelligence saying that they just wanted to cut off that side of the river and, as you say, make the safe havens or separate, in some cases, the different parts of the population in the vicinity of Mosul. There are some indicators that they just wanted to close that route because it's a route that coalition forces use to go from Mosul to Tal Afar. I personally think, no matter what it is, and we'll find that out soon as we continue to pull some of the strings, it's an additional indicator that these people who are trying to disrupt the people of Iraq will do anything to screw up this nation. That's a key bridge just like the Khawara[ph] Bridge which was

blown a few weeks ago further to the south in Salah ad Din Province. We rebuilt that bridge and now have a floating bridge near Beiji for economic and just citizen traffic across that bridge. But in terms of the extent of damage, it will disrupt the improved economics of the area at this point. It is closed now for vehicle traffic. We had a pretty good assessment of it yesterday by both coalition forces and Iraqi forces out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi Army Division. There is a path you can walk across. It's not real safe. It's about a meter-and-a-half wide, but it's not completely...the span is not completely destroyed. And we think we can repair it or at least make it serviceable here quickly.

**REP4:**

Are you confident you can protect it once you get it repaired?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

You know, there's going to be continued spectacular attacks. Are we confident we can protect it? As soon as I say, "Yeah. We're confident," it's going to blow tomorrow. The point I want to make is we're trying, along with the Iraq Army, to protect all the infrastructure of Iraq. And these people who are fighting us, who are fighting the Iraqi people, continue to just destroy with no intent to contribute to what Iraq is trying to be.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

And it really goes back to the nature of the enemy. And what you

have seen in some of these concerned local citizen groups is they have responded to these kinds of attacks on their national infrastructure. They don't want their roads targeted by al-Qaeda. They don't want to see the disruption in their economy and so they're willing to actually take up their weapon and help contribute...provide point security to those kinds of pieces of infrastructure.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

I was talking to a man named Moud[ph] on the western side of the Kawara[ph] Bridge the day after it was blown as we were doing...attempting to do a repair and do a temporary span while we built the float bridge. And he said he was ambiva...I mean, the equivalent of ambivalent about the coalition forces being there in the past. He didn't like them there but he was ambivalent about it. He said now he is very glad that we were working with the Iraqi Army to counter these individuals that were in his area continuing to detract from his way of life; which, I think, is a true indicator of how most people feel that join the concerned local citizens.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, ma'am.

**REP5:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Good evening. Question from the Iraqi Unions of Media. We

witness the operations of security transition here and there, does that mean that there's less interference from the American side or less patrols by the Americans in the streets?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, that's a great question. Let me start off and then I'll let General Hertling talk specifically how he would address that in MND-North. The Iraqi people, the Iraqi security forces, and the coalition have achieved some hard-fought gains over the last several months. Very tough fighting, a great deal of sacrifice both on the part of the Iraqi people and the security forces. As General Petraeus and General Odierno have looked at the transition, as we have all said, we've known the surge was temporal in nature and would come to an end, they have focused on a couple of things. First, protect the hard-fought gains that all of us have helped contribute to. And secondly, make the necessary adjustments to the battlefield geometry in such a way that we set Iraqi security forces up for the greatest prospect of successfully assuming responsibility for security. How do you do that? Well, first of all, it's about building the capability of the Iraqi forces. And, as you know, there's a great deal of effort underway to help better equip, better train, and better support Iraqi police, Iraqi Army, and others. Another way that you do that is you involve the local citizens in such a way that they help their security forces and the coalition forces fight above our weight,

if you will, or perform even at a level that we wouldn't otherwise be able to without their support. That's a great deal of what, not just the concerned local citizens are doing, but just the citizens in general by providing more information, more tips, helping us see the circumstance that the extremists are trying to exploit. And then, finally, we do it by adjusting forces. And we are adjusting forces so that as units redeploy, you make the compensation necessary that you don't remove forces but you thin them. Or you step back and partner but there's not an absence of presence there. All of those are factors in how the commanders are approaching this across Iraq. And the key point being we all respect the hard-fought gains that have been achieved and we all know that there will be necessary changes to the battlefield geometry. And so take those in such a way that it gives the Iraqi forces the best prospect, working with their citizens, to sustain the improvements in security. And also continue to advance security because we will all agree that the level that we're at now, while better and encouraging, isn't sufficient and it has to continue to improve. So we've got to find ways to keep the momentum going forward even, as General Hertling mentioned, we know al-Qaeda will continue to push back and there will be tough days ahead. So that's the concept, if you will, or the approach that the Multi-National Force is using along with the Government of Iraq and the Ministries of Defense and Interior to make the



necessary adjustments. Shukran. And I'll turn that over...

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

I think to answer your question is...will there be less coalition forces in the areas? I can't speak for Baghdad but I can speak for our area of operations. As the force size decreases, and it will over the next six months; that will certainly be the case. What I will tell you about in my area is we are sharing battle space; in many cases doing joint operations with our Iraqi brothers. But in some cases moving forces around so they have areas of operation all to themselves. I was just in a meeting with General Essa who is the Deputy Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division yesterday. His commanders are on the Haj so he and I were talking about what we wanted to do in January. And there was a piece of the battle space that I had to leave uncovered. And he said, "I can put a brigade down there." So we made the coordination as two partner-commanders would and arranged our forces so he will cover one area of the battle space all by himself without us doing any action in that battle space. General Krashid[ph], in the western part of Ninawa, is covering a large portion of the battle space in that area from Tal Afar-Sinjar to the west with no coalition forces at all out there. So I think as we continue to move forces around, do some different things, that you will see continued joint operations but more and more capability by the Iraqi Army to do operations on

their own.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

If we boiled it down to just two things we would say that this is about maintaining population security while transitioning and it's based on doing it with a conditions-based approach. So as conditions warrant, we'll take the necessary adjustments whether it be our forces or to the positioning or to their size. Shukran.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

If I could say one more thing. One of—it keeps doing this—one of the things General Essa told me as we were planning the operation, as we were moving forces around, he said, “You know, this area that you're not looking at should also be considered so we should both put forces there while we're separating.” So it's that kind of dialog that's going on between commanders who have now bled together on the battlefield that's ensuring the population is secured.

**REP6:**

Yeah. Patrick Quinn from The Associated Press. Can you expand a little bit on the 40 to 50 percent that you mentioned earlier? You said you had a 40 to 50 percent reduction since June.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

In IEDs, as an example, from June until November, for IEDs alone, it was exactly 50 percent. We had 1,698—and this number sticks in my mind because the math was exactly right—and if you do half of

that, about 847, somewhere in there [laughs]—I didn't do well in math in college—it was exactly 50 percent number of explosion reduced in November. Now, as we're watching December, we think we'll get a slight increase during the month of December. And that's because of some of the operations we've done in areas that we weren't in before. But we've seen a precipitous decline in IED operations. And while doing that, those were total IED events, what we've also seen in those 800 and some that we, in fact, had, there's been also an increase in the found and cleared rate in MND-North. We're finding and clearing before they explode about 52 or 53 percent of the IEDs in our area of operations. That's critical because they're either being pointed out by local citizens who are now on our side, or the tactical savvy of the soldiers in the ISF is going through that area are finding them much easier. That's an indication of what's going on in the enemy, too, by the way. The other 47 percent are either being about, as I recall the numbers, about 12 or 13 percent are actually causing some type of damage or injury or death. And the remaining percentage is exploding but not harming anyone. That's just one indicator.

**REP7:**

Meryl Calvin, Sunday Times. I've just come in so I'm not following the details of Operation Iron Reaper but I wonder if you could go back...[unintelligible], go back to Diyala and two things. It's a

mixed province as my understanding. A lot of the...

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Very much so.

**REP7:**

...Shi'a communities were complaining, certainly in earlier days when I was here, that they were being attacked by the Sunnis. I wonder if you could comment on that...the status of that internecine level of violence. And also, if you wouldn't mind kind of brief—I know everyone here is up on the details—but a brief overview of why you started Iron Reaper, progression, and where we stand now. I mean are there actual lines where the IA or MNF are and al-Qaeda...where do you think al-Qaeda is?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

There are. To answer your final question first, there are some areas where we think they are. I'm not going to discuss where that is because we're going to continue to pursue them through those areas. In terms of, as you say, the internecine violence, I wouldn't classify it as Shi'a being attacked by Sunni. I think that's a little bit too far in the extreme. I think it's Sunni extremists attacking Shi'a in many cases. And in the other cases, Shi'a extremists attacking Sunni. And Diyala is a very mixed province. It is, as many of you...as the governor reminds me on a daily basis, "a little Iraq." So, yeah. There are some continuing difficulties, And I think that's

why al-Qaeda wants that province so very much because it is a little Iraq. And it also gives access to Baghdad and it also, as we've seen in the previous strategy, considered their caliphate capitol now as well as the provincial capitol between Baqubah and Muqadadiyah. But, yeah, there's still some additional extremists that we have to continue to pursue in that province and we will continue to do that. We chose the areas of Iron Reaper, which really have to do with the western part of Diyala as well as areas within Salah ad Din as well as western Mosul, for a very specific reason. Every operation we do is based on very specific intelligence that we're receiving. And what we're getting as we continue and use the expression again of pulling strings, it allows us to go after one or two which gives us more and more opportunities as we collect additional intelligence from those that we kill or capture. We have had a significant amount of intelligence from both Mosul and from Diyala Province in terms of where the enemy is and what he's doing. In Ninawa Province specifically, I'll tell you that we have captured or killed a total of 13 emirs—and that's their term, not mine, for the various leaders throughout the province—over the last four weeks. From the ones that we have captured we have gained a significant amount of intelligence because as soon as they are captured, they are willing to talk about their organization. We have also found that they are...many of them are taking money that's meant for the

fighters that they are hiring in Ninawa Province, as an example. And it's interesting to us that the ones that we are capturing are willing to talk, not only about the organization, but the personalities of other leaders within those organizations and how some of those personalities, in fact, are in it for personal gain as opposed for the alleged ideology of al-Qaeda.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

We'll take one more question. Yes, sir.

**REP8:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Question from al-Huriyah Radio. During the process your troops...during the process your troops... Okay. By targeting some civilians...some of the troops gave them some documents so that they will be...so that they tell them that they were not being targeted intentionally. So how would the civilians know that they will be compensated? They come to us and we tell them we don't know how the Americans will compensate you. So how will the civilians that are actually...sometimes get targeted unintentionally, how will they be compensated?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

First, let me just say that coalition forces and Iraqi security forces work very, very hard to focus their efforts and impact only this enemy that presents such a danger not only to our forces but to the

Iraqi people. As you know, and the Iraqi people know all too well, this is an enemy who very frequently seeks to locate himself among innocent people and he uses them to make it more difficult for the coalition and Iraqi forces to fulfill their responsibility. Having said that, the coalition and Iraqi forces take great diligence and exercise as much restraint as this very complex and very difficult environment can allow. When there are instances where our activities damage property and tragically injure those civilians who are innocent, our units will follow up with the neighborhood advisory councils and with those Iraqi officials in the neighborhood to make contact, to find out who has been affected by those operations, and to provide the necessary follow up so that we can show our respect to them and so that we can fulfill our obligation to them. So the way that happens is by coalition force representatives working directly with the leadership; sometimes it's a tribal leader, sometimes it's an elected leader, sometimes it's just someone who knows the individual who is injured to bring it to our attention so that we can provide the necessary arrangements to provide for their needs. But I will tell you, on behalf of the coalition, that we have great respect for the Iraqi people. We know the difficulty that this enemy creates by the way he places himself in and among the Iraqi population. And we will work...continue to work very hard in those kinds of circumstances to provide for our obligation to them.

Shukran.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

If I may add to that, too, and it's a specific example we were discussing yesterday. In Diyala Province, based on the operations that occurred there in June and July where there was a lot of kinetic activity, there were many houses and pieces of property damaged during that kinetic activity. One of the very good things about what's occurring within the Iraqi Government right now is they have just issued Governor Ra'ad, the governor of Diyala Province, the capability of paying—and I think the number's about 550 or 600 families—reparations for damages to their house. We were talking to some of their director-generals yesterday. They have only been able to distribute about 200 of those checks so far to people who had damaged houses. And they are, in fact, hoping—he's made several appeals over the Diyala state radio and television networks for those who continue to want a claim to come in and get their claim checks that they have already written through the Iraqi Government. I see that as a very good news story of our links, the coalition force links with the Iraqi Government and how things are improving in that regard.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

It's actually 562 checks that have been authorized. And the Deputy Minister of Municipalities and Public Works is the lead minister in



coordinating with Governor Ra'ad as General Hertling said. And they have already addressed the needs of several other villages. And so there will be another series of compensations that are made to the citizens of Diyala. I want to just close today with a couple of comments if I could. First, we wish our Iraqi friends and counterparts the best wishes during the celebration of Eid. I would also like to mention today that Major General Joe Phil[ph] and his headquarters in the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division are completing an extraordinarily challenging mission here as Multi-National Division–Baghdad and their sacrifice and their service is something that is a great example to all of us as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. And we just want to say thanks to the great soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Team, the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division and wish them a successful return home. And finally, I'd like to finish by saying thanks to General Hertling for coming down here. It's a good ways from his headquarters. He came here today because of the importance of the operations going on at Multi-National Division–North and the interest that we know there is in what's happening up north. And for a division commander to take the time to come down here and meet personally with the representatives of the media in the Baghdad bureaus is a great commitment on his part. So, Mark, thank you very much. And with that, we say ma'salaam, shukran jaziilan.